FIFTH EDITION

CRITICAL ISSU EDUCATION
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JACK L. NELSON • STUART HY

Critical Issues in Education

Dialogues and Dialectics

FIFTH EDITION

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Foreword

This fifth edition of *Critical Issues in Education* is especially welcome in the wake of September 11th and worldwide acts of terrorism. Decent people everywhere recognize something must be done to combat terrorism, but many of us have doubts about the efficacy of violent retaliation. One act of violence seems to lead relentlessly to another. Still more of us worry about the trend toward censuring (or even censoring) speech that raises questions about the actions of our own government. It is alarming, too, that some of our citizens have expressed willingness to sacrifice constitutional rights such as free speech, privacy, and speedy trial by an impartial jury in the interests of safety. We are understandably afraid. But if we voluntarily give up our rights, one great battle against terrorism will be lost. No doubt, strong arguments could be brought against the position I have just taken, and so readers have encountered a critical issue even before starting the actual text.

Critical issues require critical thinking and vice versa. Obviously, critical issues are best addressed by well-informed logical arguments, but it is not always recognized that critical thinking develops best as it is applied to critical issues. Too many educators would like to teach critical-thinking skills without getting involved in critical issues. They assume these skills can be taught in the abstract—perhaps with a focus on the rules of logic. As a teacher of mathematics and philosophy, I believe knowing the rules of logic helps us to make sound arguments, but it cannot obviate the need to grapple with real issues, and it certainly cannot provide the motivation that arises naturally when issues are passionately contested. Thus, it seems illusionary to suppose we can avoid critical issues and still teach critical thinking.

We must learn to talk to one another without descending into violence. This may be the toughest and most important problem facing humankind, and we have not made much progress despite being aware of the problem for centuries. I used to think (and I still do, but to a smaller degree) that violence is largely a problem of masculinity, but I've begun to see that women often have bought peace by a process of repression. We say to husbands and sons, "Now don't bring up politics with Uncle Ed or taxes with Grandpa or religion with Aunt

Lillian or . . ." and we counsel this avoidance in the hope of a "nice visit" or a "quiet dinner." The advice still seems wise, if our main aim is a nice visit or a quiet dinner. But how will we learn to discuss difficult issues with strangers if we cannot do it even with those well known to us?

In my Foreword to the fourth edition, I recommended that people open conversations with opponents by discussing noncontroversial topics. John Dewey also made this recommendation, and I still endorse it. However, we can't stay at that level and hope to resolve our differences. My hope was (and is) that when dialogue has produced at least the beginnings of a caring relation—one in which it is unthinkable to do real harm to the other—it should be safe to address the issues that separate us. But if we cannot broach issues of race, religion, money, or politics with loved ones and classmates, where will we learn the necessary skills?

Nelson, Palonsky, and McCarthy have given us an opportunity to learn these skills through a book filled with controversial issues in education. The issues are real, the topics "hot," and the presentation lively. Both teachers and students should be motivated to go beyond the text to gather the very latest information on each issue. Because the issues presented here are real and timely, their status can change rapidly, and readers should watch for recent developments.

In rereading *Critical Issues in Education,* I was reminded forcefully of a phenomenon in today's education that troubles me greatly. Educators are not engaging in aims-talk; we are not asking the great "why" questions. More than thirty years ago, this same phenomenon worried Charles Silberman when he wrote about the "mindlessness" of schooling. Carefully documenting his claims about curriculum and classroom teaching, he said, "It is rare to find anyone—teacher, principal, supervisor, or superintendent—who has asked why he is teaching what he is teaching" (1970, pp. 172–173). Today one can make an even sadder comment. The "why" question has been answered mindlessly: "Because it's on the standard test." My hope is that readers of this book will learn the habit of asking why and come up with more adequate answers not only to questions about curriculum and teaching but also to those of larger policy issues.

I'll close this brief, but enthusiastic, Foreword by drawing readers' attention to one of the most crucial of the critical issues discussed here—the privatization of schooling. Is education a public good, as many of us have long supposed, or is it better thought of as a consumer good? A consumer good is one valued by, and of benefit to, the one who selects and purchases it. My acquisition of a consumer good yields no direct benefit to the public. Such goods are offered at a range of prices, and the public is not generally concerned about the goods available to particular segments of the population unless something vital (for example, food) is entirely unobtainable for them. Then compassion or self-interest (fear of reprisal or revolution) triggers public concern.

What is a public good? The very definition of "public good" is a controversial issues (Anton, Fisk, & Holmstrom, 2000). If we define it, as some economists do, as a good that cannot be privatized (for example, the light beam from a lighthouse) or as one that can only be provided by government (national defense, for example), then education is not a public good, because it clearly

can be provided by private groups and can be restricted (as the light from the lighthouse cannot be) to those who can afford it. But if we define a public good as one that benefits all of society when acquired by any of its members (and the more who acquire it, the greater the collective benefit), then education is clearly a public good (Noddings, 2001). The question then becomes whether a public good, so defined, can best be distributed, managed, and evaluated by private organizations. Thus we have, in the question of privatization, not one but several controversial questions.

As you read this book, be ready to think and speak up, but be gentle with your opponents.

Nel Noddings

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Preface

We are delighted to welcome you to this fifth edition of original essays covering the great debates about schools in society. And it is a special pleasure to introduce our new coauthor, Mary Rose McCarthy, who brings rich and vital perspectives to this edition.

School and Controversies

Persistent school issues reflect basic human disagreements. Ideological differences in politics, economics, and social values undergird the battles over schools. The issues and competing ideologies deserve critical examination. It is informative to study schooling by reading newspaper or magazine reports of test scores, finance, and school activities. But the media often ignore or gloss over basic social or ideological conflicts and can sterilize issues by presenting only one view; few media provide alternative views of an issue. The implication that there is one correct view obscures historical, political, and social contexts surrounding school controversies.

On the one hand, the public views American education as being in deep trouble and getting worse; on the other hand, they view their local schools as remarkably good, with excellent teachers and high-quality programs. If we had a third hand, we could add another view. New views emerge as debates over education stimulate us to rethink our positions.

Schools, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, are still among the most important and most controversial social institutions. For over three hundred years, people on this continent have agreed on the importance of education, but have disagreed over how it should be controlled, financed, organized, conducted, and evaluated. Two centuries ago, a very young United States was debating the establishment of free and compulsory education, arguing over who should be educated, who should pay, and what should be taught. We have mass education now, but some of these same arguments continue about schools. Of course, controversies about important issues are inevitable and, we argue, healthy in a democratic society.

A century ago John Dewey published "My Pedagogic Creed," calling the school the "fundamental" means for progress and reform of society. His book, *School and Society,* published in 1900, laid out some basic social premises for progressive education. Those progressive premises remain under attack in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Social reformer Jane Addams, speaking at the National Education Association meeting of 1897, noted the social purposes of education and the need for schools to provide improved education to "foreign-born children," a precursor to current battles over multicultural education. Susan B. Anthony, cofounder of the National Womans Suffrage Association, argued, also in 1897, that schools then closed to women should open their doors to equality. Race, class, and gender discrimination remain educational issues more than a century later. Many other school controversies have arisen over the course of time, but pervasive issues survive, often different in patterns and details.

Our effort, in this book, is to explore a collection of pervasive and critical school issues by providing divergent views on each. The issues presented are dynamic. By presenting them in the form of opposing essays, we intend to show how provocative and complex they are. That does not mean they are unsolvable problems; it does suggest that good solutions rely on engaged and informed debate. We see the terrain of education as rugged and rocky, with few clear paths and many conflicting road signs.

For this edition, we completely revised and updated all chapters and we have replaced some topics that appeared in older editions with new chapters on current educational issues debates: equity and a gap in academic achievement, standards-based schooling, technology, and religion–church/state and education.

Organization of the Book

The introductory chapter presents a background and a process for examining reform efforts and debates in education.

The three following sections are each devoted to a major question about schooling and are introduced with background material to provide a thematic context:

Part One: Whose Interests Should Schools Serve? Theme: Justice and Equity

Part Two: What Should Be Taught? Theme: Knowledge and Literacy

Part Three: How Should Schools Be Organized and Operated? Theme: School Environment

Each part contains chapters on specific critical issues, and each chapter contains two essays expressing divergent positions on that issue. Obviously, these do not exhaust all the possible positions; they do provide at least two views on the issue, and references are provided in each chapter to encourage further exploration. At the end of each chapter are a few questions to consider and a brief sample of related data.

The three coauthors each took primary responsibility for writing different parts of this volume. For Jack Nelson this includes Introductions to Part One and Part Two and Chapters 1, 8, 9, 12, 13, 16, and 18. For Stu Palonsky it includes Introduction to Part Three and Chapters 6, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, and 19. And for Mary Rose McCarthy it includes Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7.

Acknowledgments

We thank Nel Noddings of Stanford University and Teachers College, Columbia, for her provocative and insightful Foreword.

We also want to thank colleagues and reviewers who made many suggestions for this revision. We received particularly valuable suggestions from a variety of faculty members and students who have used this book in one or more of its four previous editions. Thanks to them for their important contributions.

We owe great intellectual debts to a long list of scholars, writers, teachers, and others who examine the relation of education to society, and who express divergent ideas in the extensive literature available. That group includes a variety of educational and social theorists and critics, as well as a corps of school practitioners who live the life of schools. We also are indebted to students, colleagues, and others who provided specific criticism and assistance as we worked through the various topics. In particular, we express appreciation to Terri Wise, our primary editor at McGraw-Hill; Beth Kaufman, the McGraw-Hill education editor; Marilyn Rothenberger, our project manager; Cara Harvey, development editor; and to Gwen, Nancy, and Cornelia for support, enthusiasm, and criticism when needed.

We especially appreciate the contributions of many colleagues who reviewed the manuscript, criticized the work in progress, or provided provocative ideas to challenge us. Among these are John B. Aston, Southwest Texas State University; Pat Benne, Wittenberg University; David Blacker, University of Delaware; Deron R. Boyles, Georgia State University; Wade A. Carpenter, Berry College; Mark Caruana, attorney, Carlsbad, CA; David Cauble, Western Nebraska Community College; Cathryn A. Chappell, University of Akron; Eleanor Cohen, editorial and technological consultant, Vista, California; Diane Crews, Binghamton University; Warren Crown, Rutgers University; James Daly, Seton Hall University; Emily de la Cruz, Portland State University; Russell Dennis, Bucknell University; Xu Di, University of West Florida; Annette Digby, University of Arkansas; Gloria Earl, Indiana Wesleyan University; Herbert Edwards, attorney, Harbor Springs, Michigan; Paul Edwards, attorney, Colorado Springs, Colorado; Dean Kenneth Eltis, University of Sydney, Australia; William and Sheila Fernekes, Hunterdon, New Jersey, Central High School; Mark Garrison, D'Youville College; William Gaudelli III, Central Florida University; Karen Graves, Denison University; Harry D. Hall, Indiana Wesleyan University; Julia O. Harper, Azusa Pacific University; Sharon Hobbs, Montana State University; Tony W. Johnson, West Chester University; Ramon Khalona, Engineer and Technological Consultant, Carlsbad, CA; Kevin Laws, University of Sydney, Australia; Becky Lewis, University of Buffalo; Stephen Earl Lucas, The University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign; Chogallah

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We dedicate this effort to Megan, Jordan, Jonathan, Barbara, Mark, Steven, Robert, Mary Catherine and others of the generation of students and teachers who will be at the core of critical education debates in this twenty-first century.

Mary Rose McCarthy

Stuart Palonsky

Jack Nelson

SPECIAL PREFACE BY JACK NELSON AND STUART PALONSKY

Introducing Mary Rose McCarthy

Earlier editions of *Critical Issues in Education* included Ken Carlson as our coauthor. Unfortunately, Ken is unable to continue in this work, and we miss his important and insightful contributions as well as his critical judgment. We are especially fortunate, however, that Mary Rose McCarthy, a professor in educational foundations and history at Pace University, has agreed to join us as coauthor for this fifth edition.

Mary Rose has a set of educational and life experiences that differ significantly from ours. She served as a teacher and as an assistant principal in a Catholic girls' school, and was moderator of the Black Students' Union. She was a consultant for several years to a large urban school district on gender issues in the curriculum, and was a director of a cooperative urban program involving a soup kitchen and shelter. Her academic background includes a B.A. in philosophy, summa cum laude, from State University of New York, an M.A. from the University of Rochester, and a Ph.D. from State University of New York at Buffalo, where she was honored as a Presidential Fellow. Her dissertation was on the topic of social justice in Catholic schools for girls.

Mary Rose regularly publishes and presents scholarly papers on a variety of educational and social issues including women's studies, feminist pedagogy, cancer care, religion, and the relation of gender to race, class, and culture. She has deep interests and substantial activity in dealing with pertinent social

issues, justice, and schooling. Her similar interests in social issues and critical thinking, coupled with her wealth of experience in different educational settings, complement us well in developing a book incorporating divergent viewpoints on significant educational issues.

Our longtime colleague and friend, Rita Silverman, also at Pace University, recommended Mary Rose very highly. After working on this book, we certainly agree with Rita's positive assessment about the breadth and depth of Mary Rose's intellectual interests and talents. We also can attest to her excellent grasp of educational issues, her dependability in good writing and meeting deadlines, and her good humor.

We are particularly pleased that Mary Rose agreed to join us in writing and revising this edition, providing all new chapters for her sections and offering sound criticism on the rest.

Jack and Stu

About the Authors

JACK L. NELSON is Professor of Education Emeritus of Rutgers University, where he served for thirty years achieving Rutgers rank equivalent to Distinguished Professor. He has a doctorate from the University of Southern California, an M.A. from CSU–Los Angeles, and a B.A. from the University of Denver. Jack's teaching experience includes elementary, secondary, undergraduate, and graduate levels; his university experience in addition to Rutgers includes CSU–Los Angeles, San Jose State University, SUNY–Buffalo, and Cambridge University—and he has been a visiting scholar at the University of California–Berkeley, Stanford University, Colgate University, University of Colorado, University of Washington, CUNY, and, in Australia, at Curtin University and Edith Cowan University–Perth, and the University of Sydney. *Critical Issues in Education* is his seventeenth book; he also has published over 175 chapters, articles, and reviews. Jack has received awards from the American Association of University Professors, and was the 2001 recipient of the National Council for Social Studies Academic Freedom Award. He is listed in *Who's Who in America* and *Contemporary Authors.*

STUART B. PALONSKY is professor of education and Director of the Honors College at the University of Missouri–Columbia. A former public school teacher in New York and New Jersey, Palonsky graduated from the State University of New York at Oneonta and Michigan State University. His publications include the book *900 Shows a Year,* an ethnographic account of high school teaching from a classroom teacher's perspective. In addition, Stu has published numerous articles and reviews in education and social science journals, and has presented research papers on education issues at national and state conferences. For ten years, Palonsky and Nelson were colleagues at Rutgers University. Nelson was the more prolific scholar; Palonsky the better tennis player.

MARY ROSE MCCARTHY is Assistant Professor of Education at Pace University. She earned her Ph.D. in the social foundations of education at the State University of New York at Buffalo with a concentration in the history of

education. She earned her M.A. at the University of Rochester. Mary Rose has been a secondary school teacher and administrator, and also has worked as the director of a work cooperative for guests at a Catholic Worker House of Hospitality. She served as a family life educator, working with parents whose children were at risk of being placed in foster care. Mary Rose has been an activist for social change for over thirty years and that commitment is reflected in her current research in educational policy issues and the ways teacher education programs address issues of social justice. She has presented at national conferences of scholarly organizations including the American Educational Research Association, American Studies Association, History of Education Society, American Educational Studies Association, and National Women's Studies Association. Mary Rose has written on Catholic high schools for women, gender issues including breast cancer and religion, writing educational history, and urban education. She currently teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in the foundations of education and in instructional methods.

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